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Religious identification of Moroccan youth in the education system of greater Madrid, Spain

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this paper is twofold: 1) to describe the interplay between religious identification and Spanish educational policy by studying a targeted group of immigrant Moroccan children and young people in metropolitan Madrid and 2) to highlight how such experiences have resulted in the evolution of intercultural education in Spain. The research underpinning this study focuses on targeted students in primary education, compulsory secondary education, non-compulsory education and vocational training and demonstrates that young Muslims of Moroccan descent tolerantly respect the surrounding environment whilst they reaffirm their religious beliefs. They are challenged by Spanish society but receive support from their family, frequently visit the mosque and sustain strong interactions with the Muslim community. They also recognise the respect they receive from their teachers and classmates, which encourages them to uphold their religious beliefs while acknowledging values of co-existence in Spanish society. The study concludes by signalling the need for the educational system to improve its capacity of acceptance of these youth, particularly because some youth do not live free from stereotypes and fears about Muslims.

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Introduction

The aim of this paper is twofold: 1) to describe the interplay between religious identification and Spanish educational policy by studying a targeted group of immigrant Moroccan children and young people in metropolitan Madrid and 2) how such experiences have resulted in the evolution of intercultural education in Spain. This study focuses on the Moroccan community in Madrid, and especially primary education, compulsory secondary education, non-compulsory education and vocational training (see [Table 1](#)). After outlining the school experiences of Moroccan youth in the study, we detail how the Spanish formal education system addresses immigration in general and the religious freedom of the target group in particular. These realities provide an interpretative framework for understanding the needs of Moroccan students, based on a policy to respect their religious

Table 1. Moroccan students by sex and level of study. 2013–14 academic year.

	TOTAL	Nursery school	Primary school	Special needs school (1)	Compulsory secondary education	Non-compulsory secondary education (2)	Vocational Training Courses	Others (3)
BOTH SEXES								
Morocco	171,121	53,971	66,481	1139	31,950	4859	7395	5326
Male								
Morocco	90,738	28,307	34,896	708	16,698	1978	4267	3974
Female								
Morocco	80,383	25,664	31,585	431	15,252	2881	3038	1532

(1) Students who have combined impairments in mental development and those who are severely mentally handicapped.

(2) This includes foreign pupils studying at this level through in-class or distance learning.

(3) Schools for languages, adults, art and sports.

Source: Compilation based on data provided by the Ministry of Education, Sciences and Sports.

practices in schools and to evaluate what this freedom actually means to them. This is accomplished through an analysis of how the Spanish education system incorporates the 'Muslim diet', how it respects the use of the Islamic veil and how it addresses the teaching of Islam in schools.

The context for this study is the transformation over the past 30 years that Spanish schools have made in their administration, teaching and relationships with students/family members from this community and the extent to which schools have faced the challenge of educating young Moroccan students through the implementation of intercultural education approaches.¹

The case study of Mohamed

Mohamed, now a grown man, arrived in Spain from Morocco at the age of eight, accompanying his father, who was employed by a Spanish construction company. Although given Spanish citizenship, he is emblematic of a group of about 30% of Moroccan students who drop out of education by the end of secondary school and have been branded academic failures. As a result, they have not integrated smoothly into Spanish society as well as other immigrant groups. For the first few years of his life, Mohamed lived in a slum with his father in a neighbourhood north of Madrid. Because his father did not have an employment contract (under the Spanish immigration law of that time) and therefore could not provide adequate housing, his mother and younger siblings stayed in Tangiers.

According to the law at the time, all children needed to attend school, regardless of their origin, sex, race and age, and thus Mohamed started school. He struggled during the first few months, as he had to develop a relationship with new classmates and become familiar with a language he did not know. The Spanish children in the class referred to him as the '*morito*'.²

At the time Mohamed attended school, he had access to an integration classroom known as a Link Classroom. Although immigrant students without

knowledge of the Spanish language were taught in their standard classroom, for 6 months, they had to attend a specific Link Classroom with a Hispanic-focused curriculum. In these classes, which included recesses, extracurricular excursions, and physical education, students had opportunities to socialise. In the evenings, Mohamed went to a social centre where he received after-school training on the subjects he found most difficult. After his mother and siblings arrived in Spain, the social worker in charge of his case had to organise several meetings with his parents, although throughout primary school only his mother attended the sessions. Because his mother had not learned Castilian Spanish, Mohamed or his father and siblings normally interpreted for her in the company of Spanish people.

Mohamed found true moments of solace during recess when he spent time with other classmates who were also from Morocco and with whom he could speak Moroccan Arabic, although other students who came from the Rif region spoke Tarifit. On Saturday mornings, his father sent him to the nearest mosque to study Arabic and receive lessons on Islam. There was a Faqih³ in the mosque who taught children, who were mainly boys like Mohamed, since the neighbouring slum area was dominated by men and their male sons. His father and mother are now retired and spend most of their time in their family home in Morocco. Mohamed has also left Spain and lives near his parents with his wife and children. In contrast, his older and younger siblings have remained in Spain and now live in Madrid with their children.

Mohamed's nieces and nephews, who were born in Spain, are fluent in Castilian Spanish and attend school with ethnically diverse classmates from different countries. They did not have to attend integration or 'link' classrooms, having started school at the age of three. In their classes there are more Muslim children, and unlike Mohamed, who identified as Moroccan, they feel Spanish. However, they still need to explain what it means to be Muslim, since many of their classmates are still not familiar with Islam and see Muslim customs as something strange.

Although his early school record initially put him in the group of 'academic failures', Mohamed fondly recalls his school years with a mixture of surprise and enthusiasm. He remembers that in order to keep pace with the school's course of studies, he chose vocational training courses. After studying air conditioning, he was able to find work in Spain after he finished school. He now works for a multinational telephone company in Morocco.

Mohamed's story mirrors that of many young Moroccan Muslims who migrated to Spain and have lived there during the last 25 years. Their educational experience, strong family ties, regular trips to Morocco, and their search for a positive religious life continue to characterise their journey. However, despite that success of Mohamed and his family members, who by the second generation had more easily adapted to Spanish culture and society, not all new migrants have fared as well. It is important to take into account that in 1609 King Felipe III⁴ ejected most Muslims from Spanish

territory, and until the decades of the 1970's, the presence of Muslims in Spain was greatly diminished. Those decades saw a renewed migration to Spain of Moroccans, Algerians, Syrians and others from Middle Eastern and Asian countries.

However, as reported by Spain's CIS (Centre for Sociological Research), these newer arrivals, especially the youth, found less acceptance of their religion than their predecessors. In fact, CIS surveys reveal that one quarter of the Muslim youth interviewed reported that they themselves rejected many tenants of the Muslim religion such as the use of the Islamic veil by minors and even the construction of mosques (Cea D'Ancona and Vallés 2011).

Methodology

Several primary and secondary sources were used for the present study. The primary sources included data obtained in 2011 through qualitative research derived from focus groups and in-depth interviews. Focus groups included Moroccan youth between the ages of 10 and 18, enrolled in primary and secondary education, as well as two additional focus groups with young Moroccan origin youth between the ages of 15 and 22 years old. Additional data was obtained from: 13 in-depth interviews with educational professionals, a group interview with 8 secondary school pupils of different national origins between the ages of 12 and 16, and 2 individual interviews with students engaged in professional training conducted as part of the 2012–2014 R&D&I project entitled *Conflict and Migration in Local Contexts—a theoretical-practical approach to co-existence and mediation*] Reference: CSO2009-12516 directed by Carlos Giménez Romero (Autonomous University of Madrid). In 2015, two additional focus groups were conducted with young people with different profiles. Mohamed's case study was created from these interviews and the findings were drawn from the ethnographic research conducted with Moroccan families during recent years.

Secondary sources included bibliographic reviews and internet searches, and examination of Spanish national and regional legislation in education, focused on topics such as Spanish Pluralism, the Islamic veil, school food and the teaching of Islam. Parallel to the literature review, two focus groups were conducted to create a scheme, research questions and working hypothesis. Subsequently, the interviews with teachers, focus groups with children and youth, and the participant observation undertaken were analysed. Such analysis highlighted the ways that legislation was gradually adapting to these youth's situation and how they experienced their religious practices in primary and secondary schools.

Finally, these data sources were linked to the existing literature on migrants, particularly relating to Moroccan families and households. The findings are

thus the results of qualitative statements taken from the youth combined with the sources that produced the case studies.

An educational perspective of the Spanish legislative framework

The Spanish Constitution had been in force for almost 20 years when Mohamed started school. Implemented in 1978 after Franco's 40-year rule, the pillars of the current democratic system were incorporated into the Constitution. This modernised Spain and the educational system were subjected to reforms based on completely new concepts and regulations. For instance, the Constitution established a complex legislative and administrative framework in which administrative power was distributed to 17 autonomous regions and 2 autonomous cities. This transference of State power to the autonomous regions meant that they had the right to draft their own educational policies and methods of implementation at all grade levels.

In fact, Mohamed was directly engaged in 1996 in the educational transfer process and experienced it when it was completed in 1999.⁵ During that transition period, there were numerous discrepancies and inconsistencies between the intent of the Spanish State educational policies and the actual implementation of policies at the regional level. However, by the end of the period, the most important lines of actions had been defined. What the Constitution did not envisage in 1978, was that 15 years later there would be an exponential growth in the migratory flow of families arriving in Spain. By 2000, the immigrant population was equal to 2,3% of Spain's 40,499,790 inhabitants. The educational authorities were pressed to become aware of this new phenomenon and attempted to meet the challenges by enacting laws for public, private and state-funded private education.⁶

During this period, the Spanish educational system developed laws and policies to establish a more inclusive educational system, which could meet the needs of a more diverse population of students. Several national laws were passed known as LOGSE, LODE, LOE and LOMCE⁷ and these defined the educational frameworks that have prevailed during the past 40 years. The rules stipulate that students of the same age are placed at the same educational level, except for students who enrol at a later date (which is mostly the case with immigrants) or for students needing significant academic help.

Teacher training

Two key developments since the 1990s have defined teaching in public and state-funded private schools. Firstly, the drop in birth rates in Spain has been offset by the increase in numbers of migrant schoolchildren, resulting in the reduction of school closures, which in turn has motivated teaching staff, who otherwise would have left the profession to stay. Secondly, pursuant to the

Royal Decree 1174/1983 on compensatory education, teachers have been undergoing retraining to address the special educational needs of children with learning disabilities or with family or cultural 'disadvantages'. Moreover, the training has focused on the new realities facing the Spanish education system, such as developing pedagogy geared to an immigrant population and giving the teachers an intercultural perspective.

Link classrooms

Subsequent laws, particularly the Royal Decree 299/1996 on Managing Actions Aimed at the Compensation of Inequalities in Education, defined the aims, resources and actions to be taken with pupils studying 'compensatory' education. These guidelines provided a new school ethos, curricular adaptations and established 'Link Classrooms'.

Mohamed partly experienced this educational policy transformation, which was adapted to the needs of different student profiles and particularly those of immigrants, and in the first stage of his school years, Mohamed participated in Link Classrooms to learn Castilian Spanish. Today, these classrooms can be described as roomy spaces with several 'nooks': one set aside as a workshop for the teacher specialised in compensatory education, another for IT use, another for books and documents and yet another with desks that can be moved around in a circle to create a more intimate atmosphere. In such a Link Classroom, one finds up to twelve students of five or more nationalities, different ages and with different starting dates all participating together.

In addition to the Royal Decree 299/1996, local councils and NGO's supported the establishment of parent-teacher associations, country-specific culture weeks, excursions and student exchanges. Working with teacher trade unions, and school authorities, cross-disciplinary programmes of intercultural education and innovation were developed to encourage the involvement of teachers, parents and students in a multi-ethnic educational community setting and thereby enrich the students' learning environment.

Long working hours and language barriers hindered their participation in these sorts of activities, but eventually Mohamed's father and later his mother attended meetings with their son's teachers. Aware of the low turnout of immigrant parents in the parent-teacher associations and in engaging in extracurricular activities, their willingness to collaborate with the school was a clear benefit to Mohamed's educational future.

Another important step forward in adjusting to the increasing levels of migration in Spain was the enactment of chapter III of the Organic Law of Education 2016 on the Admission of Students. This law stipulates that immigrant students are to be dispersed throughout all schools in Spain in order to avoid 'ghettoisation', and facilitate the administration and distribution of benefits such as food stamps and public transport passes to students.

Spreading the immigrant student populations was intended to have the additional effect of diminishing cultural stigmas and reducing the feeling of marginalisation.

Intercultural education in Spain's educational system

Intercultural education emerged in Spain after 1990, when the Ministry of Education and the Autonomous Regional Communities became aware of the influx of 'different' students with foreign origins and recognised the need to adapt fresh measures to respond to the 'new' cultural diversity of the country, especially dealing with the foreign languages spoken by the new arrivals (García Castaño and Granados 1999, 9; Alcalá del Olmo 2004; Gil-Jaurena and Mata Benito 2005; Besalú 2002). Previously, policies and considerations of how to incorporate cultural minorities were not entirely forward thinking because since the 1960s and 1970s, the Spanish educational system had mostly focused on how to cope with its national Roma minority and the concept of intercultural education was embedded in a multicultural context addressing the different cultures and languages which have co-existed for many centuries in Spain (Catalan, Basque, Galician and Castilian) (Muñoz Sedano 1997).

Intercultural education is understood as an approach in education that is based on respecting and appreciating cultural diversity and is geared towards each and every member of society. It is a formal and informal, holistic and comprehensive intervention model that intersects all dimensions of the education process in order to achieve equal opportunities/results, overcome racism in all of its forms, and develop intercultural communication and competences (Aguado 1999, Merino and Muñoz 1995; Osuna 2012; Sáez Alonso 2006).

Profile of Moroccan schoolchildren in the Spanish educational system

In the 2013–2014 academic year, the Spanish educational system included a total of 8,075,841 pupils. 736,249 pupils or 0.09% were registered as foreigners.⁸ Of these, 536,219 were third-country nationals, that is, those coming from countries outside of the European Union and comprised 73% of the total 'foreign' students.

The number of Moroccan students was 171,121, or 2% of the total number of students, and 23% of the total number of foreign students. Moroccan students formed the largest group of foreigners studying towards a non-university education, followed by 98,590 Romanian students or 1.2% of the total number of students and 14% foreign students.

It is difficult to pinpoint the exact number of foreign students or immigrant children in these figures because children of foreign origin who are born in Spain automatically obtain Spanish nationality and are therefore counted as Spanish citizens.

According to these statistics, in 2013–2014, 89% of Moroccan students were enrolled in compulsory education. Of those, 32% were in Nursery Education, 39% were in Primary Education and 18% were in Compulsory Secondary Education [ESO].

The religious identity of Moroccan youth

The majority of Moroccan youth in the study considered themselves Muslims but there was a spectrum about their actual practice of the religion. Findings emerged from three groups: The first consisted of young people who arrived at a very early age from Morocco or who were born in Spain and who have reconciled their Muslim identity with Spanish values. The second was composed of youth who arrived at the age of 6 or 7 years and as pre-teenagers were partially socialised in Spain but clearly identified themselves as Muslims practicing their parents' rural traditions. This was the case for Mohamed and seems to be true for the majority of Moroccan children in Spain. The third group consisted of Moroccan youth born in Spain who in some cases, shared similar attitudes of secularised Spanish native youth by distancing themselves from Islam and rejecting their parents' beliefs. These three groups played a double role within the Islamic community and the Spanish society.

Young men of 1.5 generation appeared to share feelings of guilt because they thought they did not respect the Islamic prescriptions of their parents. However, they frequently expressed a desire to for 'a return to religion' feeling that Islam provided them with security and confidence. This feeling of guilt was not evident in the youth who were totally socialised to Spanish ways of life, especially for those born in Spain. As one Moroccan boy stated:

The truth is, I'm not the same as my mother. I'm really different. My mom has more faith, she's more religious and stuff. I've said lots of times, if things are good, God isn't important. But, if you're between a rock and a hard place, you'll say 'Oh my God!' This is why I said that one day I hope to get back to my roots. (Mohamed, 21 years old)

Most young Muslims learned about religion from their parents and parental models defined the religious patterns and underscored the belief system. For this reason, when many of the youth stated that they would like to return to their religion, they indicated a preference to follow the traditional and conservative practices of their parents to follow the five pillars of Islam and passed them down to them by their parents.

In additional to parental influence, much of the religious training was learned from friends, acquaintances, community people, or textbooks. Imams and religious teachers, the *faqih*, also provided spiritual guidance. The explanations for respecting the rules of Islam were based on the belief that through the religious experiences believers would have access to a transcendental life, an improvement over their current life. In answering the questions: 'For all of that, what do

you feel? Why do you pray? Why do you practice Ramadan?' The response was: 'Because when we die we are able to go to another world-Paradise.' (Focus group 1). In addition, religion provided positive outcomes in their daily lives: 'If while doing that too, I think when you pray and respect the religion, your life will be much better.' As Amin stated: 'You get married and that's it. When you follow the rules you see all the good and the bad. It's obvious that God is good. The bad is obvious too. We have all done some bad things.' Aziz adds: 'But we ask for forgiveness.' (Focus Group 2) Evidence that this guilt appeared in the second generation was not common for those who were born in Spain, at least not to the same degree than those who arrived early in Spain.

Different perceptions about Islamic customs for young women and young men were evident from the interviews with young women. They felt that their mothers normally were more tolerant and receptive than their fathers with regard to the feminine role they had to play within the family. Mothers were more sensible and open to changes about egalitarian relationships between men and women. Fathers normally represented and defended Islam and cultural traditions more rigorously. On the other hand, young men in the study were not as sensible about egalitarian relationships. They preferred maintaining cultural and Islamic rural traditional patterns in relation to the social status of women and wanted to preserve their pre-eminent role within social institutions, religion and family.

Young women reacted against ancestral Islamic traditions that gave them a secondary place within the family, and sought more freedom. They joined social women's groups, and Islamic feminine associations as well as groups that would defend their ideas such as the AJJM, Bidaia and UMME.⁹ Such groups were particularly relevant for female children of mothers who already participated in many of these associations.

Islam is always the same. What occurs, maybe, I see my father's mentality as more old fashioned than that of my mother. My mother is more modern. We practice the religion, but my father less flexible. Maybe that is why I say it's not a religious issue. My mother thinks that it is better if I have more freedom. My dad doesn't think that way. (Miriam, 21 years old)

Experiences of youth regarding religious practices in schools and educational facilities

The previous section noted that Moroccan adolescents and youth between the ages of 13 and 25 years expressed varying levels of identification with Islam. It is clear from the findings that throughout primary and secondary education, almost all young Moroccans followed the Islamic instruction they received from their parents. It follows from this, that parents and youth felt they could demand compliance to Muslim rules from schools and educational facilities. This would include the teaching of Islam and Arabic, the availability

of 'halal' food, recognising the practice of Ramadan and allowing girls the option of wearing Islamic veil while in school.

Religious practices in schools, however, are determined by Spanish legislative framework, which defines religious freedom in education. The laws that govern religious practice stem from the Spanish Constitution of 1978, which in turn stem from the Concordat with the Catholic Church in 1953, which established religious freedom in Spain. Amendments were adapted in 1976 and 1979.¹⁰ The Law on the Freedom of Religion of 1981 led to the development of the constitutional framework signed in 1992 by the State and the main religious minorities. These agreements defended religious teachings within the educational system for established religious minorities, who practiced Islam,¹¹ Judaism and Protestantism. To this day, the implementation of these agreements is still in force.

Teaching Islam and the Arabic language

Pursuant to the Cooperation Agreement between the Spanish State and the Islamic Commission of Spain of 1992, Muslim students, their parents and school governance bodies are guaranteed, if they so choose, to exercise their exclusive right to receive religious Islamic education in public and state-funded private schools. This can take place, provided that the exercise of this right does not contradict the mission statement of nursery, primary, and second level of the school (Art. 10.1). This means that Spanish primary and secondary schools should offer teaching of Islam and Arabic, time for prayer, halal diet and allow wearing of the veil.

However, 24 years later, implementation of this agreement has been limited despite the enforcement of the Spanish State. The 2014 annual report on religious freedom in Spain published by the Ministry of Justice points out that according to data retrieved by one of the Muslim federations, UCIDE, of the more than 270,300 students who had the right to Islamic education only 80,500 were effectively taught. Furthermore, religion was only taught in those autonomous regions such as the Basque Country or autonomous cities where educational powers had not been transferred.

Implementation has been made difficult because relatively low numbers of Muslim students are spread among many schools and in many different classes within the same school. Qualified teachers were only available to teach Islam in one or two groups. In light of this, the Ministry of Education proposed the idea of supplying itinerant teachers to address the needs of these pupils in several schools but this has met with opposition from the Islamic federations who feel the schools should have a full-time teacher staff to teach Islam.

The 'Muslim diet' in schools and educational facilities in accordance with laws

The rules for providing Kosher and Halal food in Spanish schools were defined by the 1992 Cooperation Agreements between the Spanish State and the Jewish and Muslim communities. These agreements apply to public establishments and military units as well. Article 14, point 4 stipulates that when requested, food for Muslim students in public and state-funded private schools should be available in accordance with Islamic religious beliefs, and fasting during the month of Ramadan should be observed. The Spanish Pluralism and Co-existence Foundation¹² notes that the issue of diet in public institutions falls within the framework of powers transferred to Autonomous Communities. In reality, however, many jurisdictions have not created specific regulations for their schools to fulfil their obligations to create alternative menus. According to the Guide on School Canteens (2008), canteens are a place where students acquire healthy eating habits and develop social skills including respect, tolerance, fellowship, etc., and in keeping with the 1992 Cooperation agreements, access to a school canteen offering menus for all students should be made available by local authorities.¹³

The dominant feature of regulation is heterogeneity regarding the possibility of adding exceptions to the ordinary menu to meet the distinctive religious needs of students (Gorrotxategi 2011). While it is true that in general the majority of Muslim parents have accepted the so-called 'Muslim diet', there are some families, who argue that because the State has breached the Agreement many families are forced to do without school meals.¹⁴ However, it is worth pointing out that mothers in many Moroccan families do not usually work away from home or if they do try to coordinate their husbands' schedules which enables them to spend more time with their children and cook 'halal' food.

The Muslim pupils from Morocco who took part in the focus groups claim that their requirement of a suitable diet in schools is usually met with receptiveness and consideration. They are normally grouped together with pupils with food allergies and are informed about the menu, assuring them that there is no pork content. This diet is not properly Halal food. At times there is increased pressure from classmates and friends who do not grasp the fact that Muslim youth do not eat pork: 'in summer last year they brought me a pork sandwich and said: nothing will happen to you. They used to tease me.' (Mohamed, 13 years old, born in Spain)

One teenager said:

Last year I was with my friends in the playground and they brought food for us to share. One of them said to me: have some pork; God won't see you. No one else will see you. And a girl who used to pick on me and call me terrorist at that point said to the other: 'No, because Allah will see him the way he sees all of us'. Then they went quiet and haven't said anything to me since. (Fatima, 16 years old, born in Spain)

When celebrating birthdays in friends' homes, they seldom have a choice of halal food: however, when they go to children's play areas, and cafes in shopping centres, they can often find a menu that meets their religious requirements. Overall, younger Moroccans are less strict about eating food in the halal manner and often will eat chicken not prepared by Muslim butchers.

Wearing of veils by Muslim girls in schools

The use of the veil in schools by Moroccan girls has been statistically increasing over the last two decades although it has not always been handled with leniency by the educational authorities. The so-called 'Veil Case', which involved a young girl from the Camilo José Cela College in Pozuelo de Alarcón in 2010, is illustrative (Eguren 2015). The incident involved a Muslim student of Moroccan origin who refused to remove her veil in the school, which constituted a breach of rules. The girl was expelled from school and sent to another, leading to an intense and contentious debate in the media. Similar cases have arisen in Madrid, Catalonia and Galicia but they did not attract the same media attention (Ramírez 2011; Mijares and Ramírez 2008). The debate, which did not last long, questioned interventions from central and autonomous governments, political parties, churches, Islamic communities, parents associations, etc. In actual fact, the use of the veil by Muslim girls has not led to any difficulties or growing tensions in Spanish public and private schools (Francés Bruno 2008; López-Sidro 2004; Pérez Álvarez 2011). The annual report on the religious situation in Spain issued by the Ministry of Justice in 2014 substantiates this. According to Tejón (2010), there is an institutional agreement not to draft specific legislation to regulate or be against the use of the veil. But recent judgments passed by Spanish courts¹⁵ do not support this position.

The conflict over the Muslim veil reflects deep-seated fears rooted in the history of the Muslim presence in Spain over many centuries, which are often sensationalised by the media or become issues for political parties.

Moroccan students are of the opinion that the issue with the veil is ongoing in schools. However, there is increasingly less opposition to young people wearing the veil. A Moroccan college student emphatically stated,

The use of the veil is free. When you are older it should be worn. Normally nothing happens by wearing it. Sometimes your classmates tease you but after explaining it to them they respect you and do not mention anything else to you. Some, not all of them.

Young people repeatedly defend their right to wear the veil and claim that it is a free and personal choice that is not imposed upon them by their parents. This dismisses the common criticism that young people wear it due to parental pressure.

In an anecdote, a girl tells of her experience in school when she once put on the veil and was told that it was not allowed in that school. Later, in college she put it on one day and the principal told her that perhaps she might encounter some problems and her classmates might reject her. She decided to put the veil on and no one teased her or said anything to her about it.

At the start, yes, because people would make comments, look at you in a weird way, but then they would stop. Then when there were several girls wearing it, the principal told me he was glad that I got the courage to put it on because now the other girls do it too. Before I started there was one girl who wore it, but she had problems and then changed schools as a result.

Young girls drum up the courage to put it on when they see other classmates doing the same. However, it is more difficult for them when there are not a lot of Muslim girls in their school and when they are divided between different classes. They feel more secure in the classroom, particularly when the school allows veils to be worn, rather than on the outside where adults approach and criticise them for wearing it.

Meanwhile, the issue of these girls wearing the veil essentially emerges in secondary education, precisely because it is during this adolescent stage that they begin to wear it and it is obviously the place where they meet other girls doing the same. This is why statements like the following are quite common:

In school I did not used to wear it but then in college I started to put it on. I saw my friends wearing it and I thought, why not?! And now everyone respects me. There are other girls who wear it so I'm fine, I'm happy. I mean no one has to wear it if they don't want to.

Under normal circumstances teachers usually respect young girls' wish to wear the veil. They can recommend that it not be worn, thinking that in the future, when they start a professional career, it might not be as easy as in school. There are teachers who, in line with the majority of Spanish public opinion, would prefer girls not to wear the veil in class as they believe it is a practice imposed on them by their parents. On the other hand, some schools have been free to implement regulations that ban the use of the veil as well as other religious and non-religious symbols such as caps used by Latin American youth as a mark of identity or gang affiliation.

Prayers

Traditional Muslim students try to coordinate prayer around their school hours. They claim that it is not a huge issue if the time of prayer coincides with a sufficiently long break between two prayers because although they pray an hour later, and at home they can be mindful. If there are more class hours, they bring their mat and pray before the class starts if the room is empty.

For example, if I don't have enough time to go home when I have evening classes, my mother says to do it as soon as possible in the classroom so that the prayers do not build up. I take the prayer mat and if the classroom is still empty, I pray before the others arrive. (Nouredinne, 13 years old, born in Spain, 2nd year secondary school)

Conclusions

This paper provides an account based on case studies and statements of Moroccan students about their identity as Muslims and describes policies developed by the Spanish state and incorporated in Spain's educational system and the extent to which these structures have responded to facilitate and meet the needs of these young people to practice their Muslim religion and traditions in a pluralist and secular society such as Spain.

The research shows that young Muslims of Moroccan descent tolerantly respect the surrounding environment whilst they reaffirm their religious beliefs. They may feel challenged by Spanish society but receive support from their family, visits to the mosque and interaction with the Muslim community. They also recognise respect from their teachers and classmates, which encourages them to uphold their religious beliefs while acknowledging the values of co-existence in Spanish society.

During primary and secondary school education, young Moroccans comply with the religious practices of their parents. For this reason and due to parental pressure they ask schools and educational facilities to adhere to certain Muslim religious requirements, such as the teaching of Islam and Arabic, fasting allowances for Ramadan, allowing the wearing of the veil, offering a halal diet, etc.

The educational system has been responding to these issues as part of the so-called policy for compensating inequalities, but due to the decentralisation of authority to Spain's autonomous regions, implementation is often not consistent.

Intercultural education, as it is implemented in schools due to the uncertainty, resistance and challenges it presents, pivots between a clear acceptance of diversity and a strong educational tradition that advocates for homogenisation (Abdallah-Pretceille 2001). This responds to the tensions imbedded in Spanish society concerning Islam, not only as a result of the jihadist events, such as the 2005 attacks in Madrid and other events across Europe, but also due to the historical failure of Spain to establish peaceful co-existence among its Christian and Muslim populations, resulting in the expulsion of the Moors in 1609.

Members of the educational system do not live free from stereotypes and fears regarding Muslims. These are usually more common with students and parents associations involved in the school setting.

What needs to be emphasised, however, in this study is the creation of a generation of young Muslims who have been educated in Spain. They balance Islam with Spanish democratic values and have advantages compared to those who have only partially been exposed to this society. The concept of Islam, for the

latter, is more traditional and in keeping with the views of their parents, many of whom come from rural areas and whose practice tends to be more conservative. In contrast, young people who have been entirely socialised in Spain have learned to engage in conversations with classmates about Islam, to present it to others, and to respond to the prejudice that many youth have about Islam and its practice. This has required many of them to study their religion in detail to be able to explain their faith and clarify any of their own doubts. Girls frequently explain why they wear the Islamic veil and boys must answer questions about why they do not eat pork, why they celebrate the month of Ramadan, and why they pray at certain times. Thus, what can be deduced from this research is that while changes and openness to Muslims is taking place in Spain, due to intercultural education and strong policy changes advocating their concerns, Moroccan Muslim youth at the school level still feel the need to reinforce their identity and consolidate their participation in Spanish society. Their presence in Spain is becoming more evident every day, but they still have difficulties in being accepted on equal terms. Young Muslims have an important pedagogical task to explain their religion in a society where religious issues have deep historical roots and are often misunderstood. As the immigrant population increases, Spain's educational policy needs to address these issues by continuing to fine tune its intercultural education model, improve teacher training and encourage parental and community involvement in the educational process. Not only will future citizens be better integrated, but religious tolerance can become a core feature of future generations.

Notes

1. We would like to acknowledge María Arrillaga, for her wise suggestions and recommendations, which contributed to this article. She is a retired civil servant from the Educational and Pedagogical Guidance Team (EOEP) of the Regional Ministry for the Community of Madrid.
2. *Morito* means the little Moor, a term normally used in a derogatory sense for people coming from Morocco.
3. A Faqih (plural Fuqahā') is an Islamic jurist, an expert in fiqh, or Islamic jurisprudence and Islamic Law.
4. Felipe III expelled more than 300,000 *Moriscos* from the Kingdom of Spain (many who remained converted to the Catholic faith).
5. Organic Law 9/1992 of 23 December dealt with the transfer of competencies to autonomous communities that accessed the autonomy granted by Article 143 of the Constitution.
6. State-funded private schools have a special status whereby the state funds part of their services.
7. The General Organic Law of the Education System (LOGSE), of 3 October 1990, was an educational law promulgated by the PSOE (Socialist Party) government and it substituted the General Law of Education of 1970, which has been active since Franco's dictatorship. This law was replaced by the Organic Law of Education (LOE), in 2006.

The Organic Law 8/2013 (LOMCE) of December 9th for the betterment of educational quality has been a limited modification of the LOE.

8. All statistics were retrieved from the Spanish Ministry of Education, Sciences and Sports: <http://www.educacion.gob.es/educabase/menu.do?type=pcaxis&path=/Educacion/Alumnado/Matriculado/2013-2014RD/Extranjeros&file=pcaxis&l=s0>.
9. Among these associations are the Muslim Youth Association of Madrid, Bidaia and Muslim Women's Union of Spain. They are fundamentally feminine associations except that the first also includes men.
10. The amendments made in 1976 and 1979 were in line with the approval of the 1978 Constitution that declared two fundamental principles: the principle of full religious freedom and the non-denominational principle of the State's religious neutrality.
11. Law 26/1992 of 10 December, Cooperation Agreement between the Spanish State and the Islamic Commission of Spain.
12. The Spanish Pluralism and Co-existence Foundation is a public sector organisation founded by the resolution adopted by the Council of Ministers on 15 October 2004, based on the proposal from the Ministry of Justice, which intended to promote religious freedom through cooperation with deep-rooted minority faiths.
13. The Guide on School Canteens was drawn in 2008 up as part of the Perseo Program (European Union) and with support from the Ministries of Education and Health.
14. In Aragon in 2013, 11 Muslim families in the Santo Domingo school of Zaragoza gave up the free school meals that they were granted that term by the autonomous and local governments and removed their children from the canteen to protest against the lack of halal food.
15. Two judgments were passed in 2013, one from the Supreme Court on banning the use of the burqa and another from the Court of Justice of Madrid (TJM) regarding the above-mentioned case. In the case of the above-mentioned girl, the TJM resolved to support the centre's measure that prohibited the use of the veil.

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Notes on contributor

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